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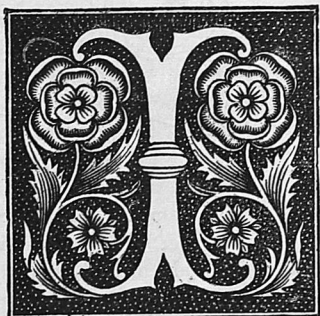
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DECORATION & FURNITURE

REFORM IN PIANO SHAPES.



IMPROVEMENTS introduced by Messrs. Broadwood, of London, in the shape and decoration of the grand piano have been noticed from time to time in these columns. One beautiful instrument last autumn was finished for the artist, Alma-Tadema, and decorated by him, the case of the instrument having been constructed after drawings and designs by Mr. G. E. Fox, an architect of repute. Last month we published a description of Mr. Burne-Jones's design and decorations for a grand piano which have just been executed by the same enterprising English firm. The need of improvement in the manufacture of this unnecessarily ungainly article of furniture must sooner or later assert itself in this country, and, of course, then our Webers, Steinways, and Chickering's will have to meet the demand. We confess, though, that we should like to see some American piano-maker enterprising enough to anticipate the demand. To show that the necessity for improvement in this direction is actually felt on the other side of the Atlantic, and that Messrs. Broadwood's efforts in that way are something more than a spasmodic freak growing out of the "art craze" in England, we reproduce from "Der Bazar," a German publication, an illustration of an upright piano, made by Gabriel Seidel, after a design by Rudolph Seitz, the Munich artist. The shape of the upright piano needs reforming as much as that of the grand piano, and it cannot be denied that it is here accomplished with true artistic simplicity. By following the natural form of the instrument, we get a beautiful curve instead of the rigid inartistic parallelogram with which we are all too familiar. Such an improvement as this may be easier for adoption than the experimental change made in the form of the grand piano. Will some American manufacturer try it?

THE ART OF FURNISHING.*

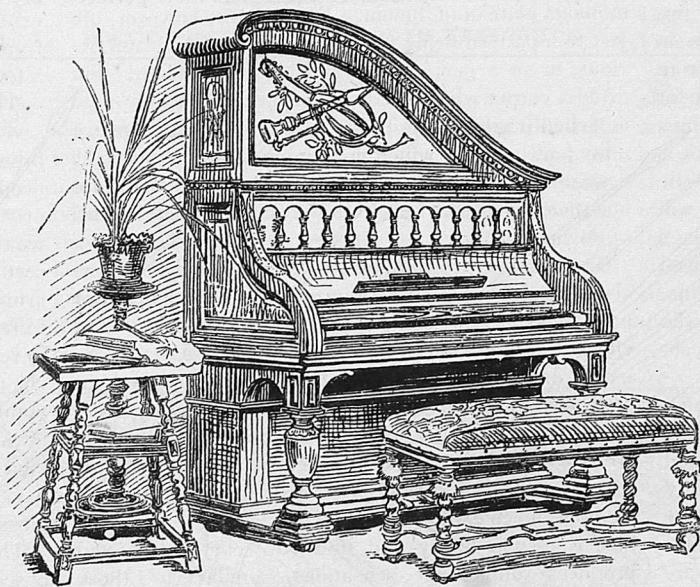
II. THE DINING-ROOM.

ONE or two considerations meet us at the outset in considering the dining-room. Is the room intended to be used solely, or chiefly, for the purpose of dining? or is it to constitute dining-room, morning-room, breakfast-room, and library in one? In fact, is the greater portion of the day to be spent in this room? If so, let us treat it accordingly, and not hamper ourselves with restrictions as to what is the proper and usual mode to observe in the treatment of a dining-room.

For a dining-room, as such, a certain richness and heaviness of decoration is not unbecoming. Where oil paintings are hung, plain sage or olive green, or dull red walls make a good background; these may be painted, or suitable papers are to be found. Pompeian red has been considerably used, and is very effective with black woodwork. There are likewise the French leather papers, Japanese and real leathers, painted canvas, or even some of the printed cretonnes, and a variety of means open to those who can afford them of covering the walls, all of which however demand, for their rightful carrying out, a panelled dado, painted, or left in the natural wood.

If, however, the room is to be both dining-room and sitting-room, we would have a less conventional treat-

ment. There should be a warmth and quiet cheerfulness, an air of sprightliness and yet repose, and, above all, an absence of monotony. And here we do not think the end can be better answered than by the judicious employment of some of the really decorative papers that are being produced just now. In some of these there is a variety of outline and a blending of subtle tints, which, while forming a comparative monotone against which pictures and objects may stand out, afford, in their absence, a singularly fascinating study for the eye, without being wearisome or over-engrossing. Harmonizing or contrasting dados are usually made for these papers, which heighten their effect, and, at the same time, help to break the line of the wall against which the furniture stands. A dado should be higher or lower than the middle of the wall (usually lower), but must never cut the space into two equal parts. The dado and skirting should not be less than three feet six inches high. No rules can be laid down for the colors to be employed here. If the conditions before mentioned are borne in mind, we do not know that we need limit the use of any subdued tints or well-balanced combinations. The position of the room will again govern the warmth or coolness of the colors. If the ceiling is not decorated, at least there is no reason why the dead chalkiness of the whitewash should not be relieved by the admixture of a little ochre or lake, or other color harmonizing or contrasting with the walls. Excepting with very light walls, a toned ceiling is much



AN ARTISTIC COTTAGE PIANO.

more agreeable than pure white, and costs no more. The tinting of a cornice, or ornamenting a ceiling with bands and lines of color, requires care and some little skill.

As regards the woodwork, the time-honored fashion of graining in imitation of natural woods can only be defended on the score of durability, and the facility with which it can be patched and touched up. Plain colors, harmonizing with the wall colors, are preferable, or even a coating of varnish alone, where the joinery is fairly good. If paint, it can be varnished, which is most lasting, or finished with an "egg-shell gloss."

In room decoration, and in a dining-room especially, a broad massing of colors is far more effective than too much fussy "picking out" of mouldings, and elaboration of delicate lines and arabesque ornament, which, at a little distance, are, for all practical purposes, lost, or worse than thrown away. As for mouldings and projections, it is doubtful whether the labor expended in tinting these produces, in many cases, so good an effect as if they were left to the natural play of light and shade.

Having decorated the walls of the dining-room, it concerns us now to study the various pieces of furniture required, their positions and proportions, so as to

leave room to move about; of what kind of wood, and consequently color, they shall be, and of what their coverings; also the color and texture of our curtains and carpets.

First of all as to the wood. If the walls are dull red you may have ebonized wood, or light oak, or very dark oak, but we cannot recommend mahogany, which is a kind of red orange, nor walnut, which, unless artificially darkened, is too weak a brown against red or crimson. Mahogany or walnut stand well against sage or olive-green, or dull gray-blue. Before deciding, however, on any particular wood, it is best to try the effect of it against the papers you intend to choose for the room.

The furniture of a dining-room should of course be more substantial than that of the drawing-room, and most people will agree with us in claiming for this room at least a degree of simplicity, if not austerity. Redundancy of ornament, a lavish profusion of carving and scroll work, together with arabesque forms of decoration, introducing bunches of grapes and devotees of Bacchus, may be suggestive of unlimited feasting, and suitable to civic banqueting halls. But we are not always feasting, and the maxim that "man eats to live," is better represented by a plain, substantial, and homely kind of furniture, which, by its very simplicity, enhances the viands placed upon it. Nor need such furniture be wanting in beauty, for we would have it exquisitely proportioned and adapted to the wants of a dining-room; and, albeit simple and severe in outline, it need not lack grace and refinement, nor, if desired, costly though unobtrusive and judiciously-restrained enrichment.

In the choice of a sideboard every one must be guided to some extent by his individual tastes. If you have no old china worth showing, do not have a sideboard with a lot of useless shelves. If you like plate glass you may have a good strip of it running the whole length of the sideboard—not too high, say twenty-four inches for an ordinary room. If this is inserted in a frame, so as to stand some inches higher than the sideboard top, it will give all the reflection that is needed. It is better for lightness and variety of effect to divide the plate into three—the centre piece being longer than the end pieces. A bevelled edge is a great improvement to small pieces of plate glass, and gives a gem-like lustre and completeness to the glass. Tiles, painted leather, and carving in low relief, are all effective additions either to a sideboard or a cabinet, but they require taste in adapting, and should always be subservient to the general aim of the work they are introduced upon, and never disturb the unity of the whole. Above all, ornamental details of this sort require to be well executed, and special knowledge and aptitude are necessary to make a good painter of tiles or decorative panels, as a perfectly natural rendering of either figures, flowers, or fruit is too obtrusive a mode of treatment, and brings the objects into undue prominence, thus producing a broken, scattered effect.

In choosing a sideboard, give the preference to straight lines—curves in the constructive lines most surely denote weakness, or occasion loss of room. Round-cornered furniture is perhaps a little less dangerous than square with small children, but this is its sole advantage. Avoid lumps of carving stuck on. They are easily detected, or if you are uncertain, ask the salesman about them. If he knows he will scarcely fail to tell you. See that the doors and drawers are sensibly arranged, and show themselves for what they are, and are provided with handles by which to open them. The key is a bad substitute for a handle.

Besides the sideboard, there are the table, chairs, sofa, and chimney-glass, all of which must harmonize with each other and with the sideboard, though not to the extent some people seem to think, there being something painfully stiff in the too precise matching of each piece of a "set" of furniture in a room. A

* Adapted for American readers from the English work of H. J. Cooper.

small table or fancy chair or cabinet of a different, though not discordant wood and color, is often a great relief in a room otherwise furnished to match.

Take care to get the best proportion and sizes possible for your dining-table, as much comfort depends on this. If the top is too narrow, plates and dishes will be huddled together; if too broad, the room space on either side will be infringed upon. The length of the table when closed should not be too great, or it will be cumbersome to move, and the extra leaves should be of convenient widths for extending the table to various lengths. In a squarish room the table need be only a foot or eighteen inches longer than broad. In a long room the length may be increased to suit the wants of the family and the look of the room. Half-circular ends to a table may make a more compact dinner party, but we prefer a square or parallelogram with the corners slightly rounded.

A dining-room chair should be strong, not too heavy to move, and comfortable. The seat should be stuffed. A good horsehair stuffing makes a wholesomer seat to our mind than soft yielding springs. The back may be stuffed or not: it does not so much matter for comfort whether it be of padding or wood, provided support is given to the spinal column of the sitter, for which purpose the back of the chair must not be too upright. Care should be taken also to have the seat of sufficient depth. An easy chair, as every one knows, is often a mockery. Sometimes, however, it happens that we get a real easy chair, and even then find it does not suit us. The truth is, a chair intended solely as a luxurious lounge is ill-adapted for steady and prolonged reading; while a chair in every way perfect as a comfortable reading arm-chair, will not conform to our wishes nor bend itself to our shape when we throw down the book and slack every tendon and ligament in our body. The two things are not compatible except in a mechanical adjusting chair, but this reminds us too closely of the dentist to be usually agreeable.

The best material for covering dining-chairs is undoubtedly morocco. There are inferior qualities in dressed skins, sometimes very difficult to detect from the real thing. If you wish to get morocco, stipulate for it in unmistakable terms. If the salesman assures you a chair is covered in "best leather," you may be sure it is not morocco, but roan, which has not the wear in it, though very similar in appearance. Utrecht velvet will wear longer than anything else, but it is hot, and clings to one's garments. Morocco skins may be dyed almost any shade. Deep madder reds, fine browns, and olive-greens are now mostly kept on hand by the leather merchants, and are useful colors for furnishing.

By far the most useful form of sofa is that in which the back and two ends are on a level (on the same line of elevation). It may be convenient to have one end rather higher than the other, but this raises a difficulty in the outline of the back, and will not make so good an appearance. All elaborate contortions in the shaping of sofas or couches should be avoided: they are always in bad taste, and where there is a margin of wood to show, render it exceedingly dangerous to attempt to rest the head, for fear of coming into collision with one or other of these abnormal bumps.

There is no objection to a good-sized chimney-glass over the mantel-piece, provided the frame is not all gilt. It is much better taste, and adds to the quietness and dignity of the apartment, to have the frame of wood, relieved with gilding, or black, or other inlay or staining.

It will be patent to most of our readers that there has been a style of glass in vogue of late, which is not so much a glass as a combination of bevelled mirrors, small shelves (supported on brackets or columns), and gilt or painted panels, and which may be termed part cabinet, part glass, having for its main object the felicitous display of old china and knick-knacks. There is some sense and a good deal of fashion mixed up with the idea. If well arranged, and with a view to the ornaments in store for it, the thing may be quaint and effective, and the bits of mirror made to answer every purpose by being brought sufficiently on a level with the reflected beauty of the lady of the house. Besides, a bird's-eye view of the room can be had in a comparatively small mirror, which is really more impressive than the image of a broad expanse of wall or ceiling.

As for the floor, we advise you, if you are likely to remain in the house, or if it is your own and you can afford it, to put down a border of wood parquetry.

Colored India mattings are sometimes used; or the floor, if at all good, may be stained. The pity is that most floors are so rough and the boards so far apart, leaving yawning cracks between, that it is labor lost to attempt to get anything like a decent polished surface.

We protest, however, on many grounds, against covering a room all over with carpet, and nailing it close into the corners and recesses. It harbors dirt which can never be thoroughly swept out, and it renders the process of taking up the carpets unnecessarily troublesome and expensive, so that they are left down for, perhaps, a year or two, whereas it would be conducive to health if they were shaken more frequently. A margin of not less than fifteen inches (eighteen inches or two feet is better) will not contract the apparent size of your room very materially, and you can then have a square or oblong carpet, with a border, either made in one, as a "Turkey" or "Axminster" carpet, or seamed up, as in a "Brussels." A Turkey carpet should not be so large as to go under the furniture, but should stand clear of it. With Brussels it does not greatly signify, as the substance is much thinner. Brussels carpet is, without doubt, the cheapest and best wearing for ordinary purposes, though for a dining-room a good Turkey carpet will prove in the long run an economical investment; and the difference to the tread is so great, that if once we get accustomed to it a Brussels carpet henceforth loses its charm.

From an art point of view, a carpet cannot be treated otherwise than as a background to the furniture, quite as much, if not more, than the walls, excepting in a room where no furniture is where alone we could tolerate those gorgeous Aubusson carpets (looking like a magnificent dessert-plate), with a large expanse of white ground, and bouquets, wreaths, baskets, and what not in the centre and borders. Indian and Persian carpet-weavers are still our masters and teachers in the art of combining colors, so as to form one harmonious plateau of bloom. We do not, however, object to a pattern being in some degree marked and obvious, or to a geometric design, if not too hard; but avoid a carpet where the lines or patterns cut it up into detached fragments and spaces, destroying all sense of unity and breadth, which in a dining-room are specially desirable qualities. The border is sometimes better for being clearly marked off from the centre carpet, instead of flowing into it.

The window, or windows, as the case may be, next claim attention. Ordinarily a small neat brass rod or pole, with simple spherical ends, is a rational and effective termination to the window curtains, proclaiming its use, and giving a quiet brilliancy where the light often strikes least. Singular fancies have been perpetrated in the matter of cornice pole-ends, but the strange hallucination that bunches of tin grapes are the natural product of a rigid brass pole, has by this time, we hope, been exploded. The thin brass stamped cornice is also a flimsy and unworthy contrivance, and produces unpleasant sensations, similar to those evoked by the contemplation of conspicuously false jewelry. Light wooden poles, to match the furniture in color or black, with very little gold or color (say Indian red or vermillion) introduced, are suitable. A gilt cornice in a dining-room is equally out of place with the gilt chimney-glass. A wood cornice picked out with gilding is better.

A few words on curtains. Look round your room. If the carpet and walls are full of pattern and various colors, the curtains will be best of one color only, or two shades of the same color. There *must* be repose somewhere in a room. If the curtains are full of pattern and color, the walls or the carpet should be quiet. Longitudinal stripes in a curtain may give height, but they add no grace, and you lose the variety and play of effect on the folds which is obtained by horizontal or cross stripes. If a curtain is bordered, the border should never cross the top of the curtain, but only run on the two sides and bottom. It often happens that curtains of some plain self-colored stuff, serge, cloth, or velvet, produce a better effect than any variegated material.

Curtains of some quiet, soothing hue, hanging in natural folds, catching the light on their edges, and deepening away into richer shades of color, will sometimes give a singularly simple and artistic finish to a room, otherwise tastefully furnished, which the most elaborately wrought hangings would fail to effect. This is the more striking where the landscape or out-

look is rich in natural tints and forms, for then the view is heightened by the quiet unobtrusive color of the curtains which practically frame it in. With narrow windows, the French style may be adopted of letting the curtains meet at the top, and then drawing them sharply away to each side, and confining them with bands of the same stuff, at the height of about four feet from the ground. The fashion is artificial, however, and with wide windows should not be attempted.

We sum up the hints on the furnishing of a dining-room by a short description of a room we have in our mind. The walls, above the dado, are papered with an olive-toned paper, or rather, the ground is actually a very dull slaty-blue, over which are trailed the stems and leaves of the orange tree, with the rounded fruit in various sizes and stages of maturity, from the tender green to the warm orange-yellow. The soft amber-white blossom of the orange tree is interspersed, and little birds in azure plumage peep in and out among the leaves and fruit. The whole coloring, however, of this paper is so deliciously cool and subdued, that scarcely one thing stands out above another, so that it is some time before you grasp the whole of the design; and when you have made it out, it is not easy to trace the repeats in the pattern, so cleverly are the details varied and interwoven.

Below this is a dado of plain flock paper of a deep crimson, almost ruby tone, and divided off from the upper paper by a broad black and gold line. The dado paper is not put on in widths, as the joinings are sure to show more or less in a plain flock, but is run in one continuous length round the room. The ceiling is toned down to a deep cream color.

The furniture is of light oak, of almost primitive simplicity of form, but substantial and useful, and not too large for the room. The side-board has no glass, but a shelf runs along the low straight back, on which stand various pieces of plate and glass, in daily use, an old silver urn of exquisite classic form being a prominent object. Over the mantel-piece is a low mirror framed in oak, and with a shelf above, on which stand a few bits of Oriental china.

The chairs and couch are also of light oak, rather severe in style, with seats stuffed moderately hard in bronze green leather, which contrasts well against the deep-red dado. The chairs have a stuffed cross-piece or strap about eight inches broad across the back, and we think would be improved by another rail of some sort midway, as a support to the back. There is an arm-chair, with a rather upright back—very comfortable to read in, and provided with a wedge-shaped cushion, to render it more easy as a lounge—and also another chair with arms, a kind of writing-chair, of a somewhat pontifical shape, quite out of order with the rest, though in the same wood, and somehow or other seeming a kind of relief. A small round table in a dark figured wood—pollard oak or amboyna—likewise forms a pleasant variation.

The carpet is Brussels, Persian in style, and composed of various colors, including red, blue, green, and orange, the bloom color at a distance being a kind of rose purple. This carpet has a distinctly marked border, and is oblong in shape, except at the window end of the room, where it runs into a three-sided bay. The floor margin round the carpet is covered with linoleum, printed in a clever imitation of wood parquet which, although we cannot defend it in principle, has an excellent effect.

The curtains (it is summer time) are some unbleached copy of guipure lace in squares and diamonds, with a scrolled border, and suspended from a small brass pole, which is carried round the bay window.

A brass gaselier, evidently copied from an old Flemish model, hangs from the centre of the ceiling. In defiance of the conventional etiquette that banishes books from a dining-room, two small book and china shelves, capable of holding some four dozen small volumes, fill in the space of wall on either side the bay window, and brighten up a dark nook. There are no pictures on the walls: they are not needed, although the paper is subdued enough to admit of them.

The entire effect is that of a quiet and comfortable home-like room, with nothing of dullness or monotony; and the warm dado adds a richness calculated to counteract the depressing influence of the gloomiest sky. The whole thing, moreover, is in good taste, and any ruffled feelings which you might have had on entering must involuntarily be smoothed down before you have been seated ten minutes.